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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

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POSTAGE ON STEAMBOATS.

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LETTER

FROM

THE POSTMASTER GENERAL,

TRANSMITTING

*A communication in relation to the postage to be charged on steamboats not in the employ of the government, in answer to a resolution of the House.*

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JANUARY 24, 1848.

Read, and referred to the Committee on the Post Office and Post Roads.

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POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,  
January 24, 1848.

SIR: In compliance with a resolution of the House of Representatives directing the Postmaster General to communicate to the House a copy of any instructions he may have given to the postmaster at Mobile, in relation to the postage to be charged on the steamboats not in the employ of the government, I have the honor to enclose the copy of a letter from the Second Assistant Postmaster General, dated the 22d of May, 1847, to the postmaster at Mobile, which is presumed to be the information desired.

I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,

C. JOHNSON.

To the SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT,  
*Appointment Office, May 22, 1847.*

SIR: From representations made to this office by Messrs. Alfred Thatcher and others, a committee on behalf of the board of trade of Columbus, Mississippi, in a communication asking the decision of the Postmaster General in reference to the amount of postage chargeable on letters carried by steamboats from Mobile to Columbus, it appears that at your office the charge of *five cents* is made, for the reason, that the land mail carriage is less than *three hundred miles*. In this you are in error. The act of the 3d March, 1823, constitutes and establishes all navigable waters within the United States, post routes. The 5th section of the act of 3d March, 1825, authorizes the Postmaster General to contract for carrying the mail in steamboats. The 6th and 19th sections of the last named act prohibits steamboats from carrying letters, except such as relate to the cargo, under certain penalties, unless the same be delivered to the postmaster of the place where the person or persons may reside to whom they are addressed; the postmaster paying two cents for each and every letter so delivered. The 13th section of the act of 3d March, 1845, repeals so much of the 6th section of the act of 1825 as relates to the penalty for any violation of the provisions of the said 6th section, and substitutes therefor the penalties as provided in the 10th section of the said act of 1845, which is, \$100 against the owner or owners, and \$50 as to persons in charge of, or employed on said boats, for each and every violation. It being the intent of the act of 1825 to prevent the transmission of letters by steamboats, other than the exceptions heretofore referred to, unless the provisions of the 6th section of said act were complied with; all steamboats, therefore, that convey letters from one port or place to another port or place, are properly mail carriers, and under contract with the Post Office Department, subject to penalties for any violation of law regulating the same. Postmasters should, therefore, charge on all letters conveyed by steamboats postage for the distance over which they are actually carried. As attempts at evasions of this law are frequent, postmasters are expected, and required, vigorously to enforce its provisions in reference to the transmission of such letters. Postmasters should, therefore, require from persons in charge of steamboats, all letters except those which relate to the cargo, which are held to be, 1st, bills of lading; 2d, letters of invoice; 3d, letters of instructions to consignees as to the disposition of the cargo. These letters may relate to a part or the whole of the cargo, but must be confined to the matter as above specified, and transmitted unsealed; any variation from which will subject them to letter postage.

W. J. BROWN,

*Second Assistant Postmaster General.*

To POSTMASTER, *Mobile, Alabama.*